

PUBLIC FILE ISSUES HIGH ON FCC ENFORCEMENT LIST

By Larry Wilkins, SCBA ABIP Inspector

Public File errors continue to cost stations thousands of dollars. Recent inspections by FCC officials have cost each station \$7,000 to \$9,000 mainly due to problems with the Issues and Programs list.

The FCC requires each broadcast radio and television station to air a reasonable amount of programming responsive to significant community needs, issues, and problems as determined by the station. The FCC gives each station the discretion to determine which issues facing the community served by the station are the most significant and how best to respond to them in the station's overall programming.

To demonstrate a station's compliance with this public interest obligation, the FCC requires a station to maintain, and place in the Public Inspection File, a Quarterly List reflecting the "licensee's most significant programming treatment of community issues." By its use of the term "most significant," the FCC has noted that stations are not required to list all responsive programming, but only that programming which provided the most significant treatment of the issues identified.

These Quarterly Lists must be placed in the Public File within 10 days at the end of each quarter. Issues and Program lists are required to be retained for the entire license period.

The Public File is one of the main areas covered completely under the SCBA-sponsored Alternative Broadcast Inspection Program (ABIP). The ABIP is a true FCC inspection of not only the Public File, but entire station operations (station logs, EAS plus transmitter and tower). Under the Alternative Inspection Program, an FCC-approved engineer will visit your station (s) and conduct the inspection. Any issues found in non-compliance will be addressed in a confidential report to station management. Once a station is found in full compliance SCBA and the FCC will issue a Certificate of Compliance, which will be good for 3 years. The FCC agrees not conduct an inspection during the term of the compliance, unless a complaint is made against the station or serious safety issues have been reported.

We know that in this down economy, stations are cutting all unnecessary expenses....however; the small expense for an Alternative Inspection could help you avoid a costly fine should the FCC visit your station.

Take advantage of the Alternative Broadcast Inspection Program today by contacting the South Carolina Broadcasters Association at 803-732-1186.